

# Persistence and Transformation of Folk Religion in Urban Districts: The Case of the *Jigenji* Temple

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## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the popularity of *Shinbutsu* as one of features of urban folk religion taking the “*Nozaki mairi*” of “*Nozaki Kannon*” (*Jigenji* temple) as an example. Some features of the popularity of *Shinbutsu* are its popular appeal, being oriented toward this-worldly gain, and cultural entertainment. The paper describes how the “*Nozaki mairi*” become an established practice. It argues that this was the result of the demand and supply with respect to the needs of the urban common people.

Keywords : *Nozaki mairi*, Urban Folk Religion, popularity

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to discuss a cluster of features of urban folk religion taking the *Jigen* Temple, popularly called *Nozaki Kannon*, as an example. This temple, dating from the 17th century, is located in Daito city in the Osaka suburbs (figure 1, 2). Some features of the older urban folk religion are its popular appeal, being oriented toward this-worldly gain, cultural entertainment, and shifting popularity. For example, several functional gods, such as the god of trade and the god of fire, are worshipped in order to attain this-worldly gain. However, some of these gods and saints lose popularity. Though very popular in pre-modern and modern eras, *Nozaki Kannon* is less in demand today. It appeals to unspecified people with its *Nozaki mairi* (temple visit), worship of *Eguchi no Kimi* (a local saint) and Zen meetings. In sum, one can say that this type of folk religion is both changing and enduring.

## I. Features of Urban Folk Religion

One feature of urban folk religion is the popularity of *Shinbutsu* (a combination of a Buddha and a native Japanese god). This popularity results from the enthusiasm of the urban people for this-worldly gain and entertainment. Thus, popularity of *Shinbutsu* is an extremely urban phenomenon. The *Shinbutsu* gained in popularity among urban commoners, because they were less communally-regulated and more oriented toward this-worldly gain than peo-

ple in the country. According to Miyata Noboru, the popularity of *Shinbutsu* arose among urban commoners who worshiped certain gods more fervently. They became more popular and remained popular longer than the others. This can be observed along the space-axis (the geographical spread of popularity) and the time-axis (the temporal length of popularity). It becomes a “folkway” when the popularity endures into the next generation, but it becomes a mere “folk trend” if it lasted for a short time (Miyata 1993)<sup>11</sup>.

The rise in popularity of gods can be observed in the following two ways: 1) spontaneous trends derived from urban commoners, and 2) intentional trends created by shrines or temples by means of *kaicho* (special exhibitions of the images of gods) and *ennichi* (holy days dedicated to gods: *en* (is an opportunity for karmic fortunes, and *nichi* means day). Most medium and small shrines or temples tried to gain popularity of particular gods through *kaicho* and *ennichi*. In order to understand their activities, we must analyze the religious situation in the Edo period, when temples and people were strongly connected by the *Danka Seido* (a supporting system in which all families were forced to adopt a Buddhist temple as the family temple). One of the consequences of this institution is that Buddhism was secularized to mere *soshiki-bukkyo* (funeral Buddhism). Funeral Buddhism could relieve people’s anxieties about the after-world and ended up bringing their attention to this-worldly gain, not spirituality. That is, “a temple (in the Edo period) functioned as a prayer temple for both its *Danka* that had their family’s tombs in the temple and ordinary commoners who sought this-worldly gain. *Ennichi* and *Kaicho* were developed for the latter” (Yasumaru 1986: 28). In reality however, most temples specialized in either function. They frequently held *Ennichi* and *Kaicho* so as not only to satisfy people’s demands, but also support themselves financially. They got in financial difficulties due to the Old and New Temples Act (*Jiin Koseki Shinchi no Sadamegaki*), enacted by the Edo government in 1689 (Genroku 11). The law stipulated that temples established before 1631 (Kanei 8) were thereafter qualified as *Koseki* (old temples), and the others as *Shinchi* (new temples). Patronized by the government, old temples were under the protection of *Honzan* (the Buddha sect head), whereas new temples did not have their own domains and some of them did not even have their *Honzan* (Tamamuro 1977: 167). This indicates that new temples lacked financial support to achieve a stable management. Therefore, most of the new temples, which were forced to take rather desperate measures, decided to hold *Ennichi* and *Kaicho* more positively. These two kinds of event became very popular instantly with urban commoners because the events provided this-worldly gain and entertainment for them. This-worldly gain can be defined as “something profitable in daily life directly obtained through communication with supernatural beings” (Miyake 1980:131). The spiritual communication is mostly accomplished by means of prayers. Praying enables people to obtain a sense of security and stability when they are leading a favorable life and consolation when leading an unfavorable one (Miyata 1977:123). *Ennichi* and *Kaicho* gave urban people significant opportunities to communicate with some particular *Shinbutsu*, to which they pray earnestly for this-worldly gain. The popularity of *Shinbutsu* attracted many kinds of businesses such as

market stalls or shows, which added an element of entertainment to the events arranged by temples or some shrines.

Thus, the popularity of *Shinbutsu* was created as the result of a community of interests among urban people, temples and shrines. Worshiping particular gods developed into a significant trend and emerged as an urban phenomenon of folk religion. One of the most popular and powerful *Shinbutsu* was *Nozaki Kannon*.

## II. The Early Popularity of the *Nozaki Kannon* as an Urban Folk Religion

Thus, *Nozaki-mairi* (temple visiting) became very popular, because it greatly appealed to the desire of people for this-worldly gain and entertainment. Furthermore, the improvement of the access routes to the temple helped to increase its popularity. In the Edo period, the *Nozaki Kannon* began to attract people in the form of *Nozaki-mairi*, which was a kind of festival arranged by the temple dating back to the *Genroku* era (1688-1704). *Nozaki-mairi* started at the time of the fourth priest *Ryōan* of *Jigenji* temple, and the fifth priest *Daisin* tried actively to attract visitors to the festival to promote the temple even more. It was held every year from the first to the tenth day of May (April the first though April the eighth, in the old calendar) the best time of the year in climate and scenery. During the ceremony, the Buddhist service of *Muenkyo* was performed and the precious statue of the eleven-faced *Nozaki Kannon* was exhibited (*Kaicho*), though it originally was supposed to be exhibited once in twenty-five years. The exhibition was advertised on bulletin boards in many different places in Osaka (Daito-shishi 1973: 395).

The internal factor in the popularity of *Nozaki-mairi* was the financial crisis of the temple. First, the *Jigenji* needed a large amount of money to reconstruct the temple which had been destroyed by fire at the time of *Hisahide Matsunaga* (a local military leader) in the *Sengoku* period. Secondly, the temple had very few financial supporters (*Danka*) who could donate to the temple. Thirdly, the Old and New Temples Act (*Jiin Koseki Shinchi no Sadamegaki*), enacted by the Edo government in 1689, affected the management of the temple badly. Therefore, *Jigenji* decided to start the annual special exhibition of the statue of the eleven-faced *Nozaki Kannon*.

The external factor was the improvement of urban life. During the Edo period, Osaka was the economic center, called *Tenka no Daidokoro* (Japan's kitchen). The economic growth enabled people to have time to enjoy many kinds of entertainment and pleasure trips. On the other hand, the prosperity of Osaka made many public construction projects in the area possible. One of them was the change in the course of the Yamato River in 1704 (*Hōei* 1). This provided several new access routes<sup>2)</sup> to *Jigenji* temple, which made *Nozaki-mairi* easier to reach and more pleasant to many more visitors, and an increasing number of visitors attracted different types of businesses, particularly market stalls and entertainment business. Thus, *Nozaki-mairi* established its position as a form of entertainment in itself. Moreover, *Nozaki-*

*mairi* was dealt with in a *Jôruri* play and it was good publicity for *Nozaki-mairi*, resulting in directing more people's attention to *Nozaiki-mairi*.

The additional factor in the popularity of *Nozaki Kannon* was, incompatible as it appears, that people felt apprehension for their future in the *Genroku* era, when the gorgeous Edo culture developed fully. Although Osaka was regarded as a town of merchants, the population of "*Iemochi no Chonin*" (merchants who had a house for business) was approximately 10% of the city<sup>3)</sup>. (Watanabe: 1993: 16-7). "Most commoners were either craftsmen or small production distributors" (Shinsyu Osaka-shishi 1989: 532). The daily life of urban commoners was instable at the time and they wanted a greater sense of security.

### III. *Nozaki-mairi* in the modern times

In the modern times, *Nozaki-mairi* revived its popularity through the *Rakugo* story of "*Nozaki-mairi*" and Taro Shôji's "*Nozaki* short ballad". The *Rakugo* story of "*Nozaki-mairi*" conjured up the vivid image of what it was like, especially *Furiuri Genka* (Looking for quarrels just for fun on a ferryboat). The scene is described in the story as follows.

Who told you to fight seriously, you bastard? You know, since ancient times, the three most famous *Mairi* (pilgrimages) in Japan have unarguably been the *Okera-mairi* of Gion in Kyoto, *Konpira-mairi* of Sanuki in Shikoku and this *Nozaki-mairi*. And, on the way to either of these three *Mairi*, you can't really fight, merely to quarrel. People say you'll get a good year if you win the quarrel. Well, just quarrel and see what you'll get."

*Furiuri Genka* was already abolished in the Meiji era, because the opening of a railroad in 1895 forced the popular ferryboat to go out of fashion. The *Rakugo* story, which was made and performed in the Meiji era, gave people a good idea of what *Nozaki-mairi* had been like in the glory days. The happy feeling of going on a pilgrimage which the story could convey made the *Nozaki Kannon* and *Nozaki-mairi* more attractive and more popular.

Taro Shôji's *Nozaki* short ballad also helped the revival of *Nozaki-mairi*. One part of the lyrics goes as follows:

Let's go on *Nozaki-mairi* on a pleasure boat. Rape plant blossoms everywhere, a butterfly lighting on a fashionable parasol. Why don't we say hello to the people on the embankment?

This song was originally made for an advertisement for an amusement park with the pleasant images of the past *Nozaki-mairi*. The effect of the happy song, which was released at the end of September 1935, it became a smash hit immediately. It was so powerful that it made many more people pay a visit to the *Nozaki Kannon*.

The main means of transport for *Nozaki-mairi* had changed from boat to railroad in modern times. The more convenient railway made it easier and more enjoyable, so *Nozaki-mairi* continued to be popular as a form of entertainment. Like in the early modern times, however, the instability of city life made people living in the Meiji era seek this-worldly gain. For example, In April of 1925, Osaka was administratively reorganized into the Greater Osaka in accordance with the second City Expansion Plan, which made Osaka the largest city in Japan with the population of over 2,000,000. Out of the 900,000 working population of Osaka in the 1920's and 1930's, 10% were employers, 15% independents, an approximately 20% staff (salaried persons) and the rest 55% were laborers. Out of the 500,000 laborers, there were 30,000 factory workers and workers for public transport (including apprentices and reserves), approximately 100,000 apprentices and salesclerks and the rest 100,000 civil servants and homemakers. (Shinsyu Osaka-shishi 1994: 467) Like in the early modern times, city life therefore was always unstable for many urban commoners.

#### IV. The *Nozaki Kannon* of Today as an Urban Folk Religion

Presently, the *Nozaki Kannon* is not so popular, but its popularity is not necessarily declining. This typically indicates the persistence and transformation of urban folk religion at the same time. The most noticeable transformation of urban folk religion is that it is less attractive than before. Now people's longing for this-worldly gain, which used to be the most important factor of the popularity of urban folk religion, is directed to many other things. Especially, the diversification of modern entertainment has decreased the popularity of the *Nozaki Kannon*. This process can be called a cooling-off period for this-worldly gain and entertainment.

On the other hand, the most noticeable persistence of urban folk religion is that it is still rather popular providing people with this-worldly gain and entertainment in unique ways in spite of the diversification of modern entertainment. Even today, many people come to various events at the *Nozaki Kannon* and enjoy them because such events as ringing bells on New Year's Eve, Zen meetings or copying sutras are all open to the public, regardless of religious affiliation. Many of the events started recently<sup>4)</sup>, and it can be said that they have been designed to fulfill the diversified needs of people for this-worldly gain and entertainment.

As mentioned above, the diversification of modern entertainment has decreased the popularity of the *Nozaki Kannon*, but the temple still continues to provide people with this-worldly gain and entertainment through unique events. In other words, the popularity of the *Nozaki Kannon* has been created by the interaction of demand and supply between commoners, who continue to seek this-worldly gain and entertainment. The temple is still trying to fulfill their needs. Now the popularity of the *Nozaki Kannon* has decreased, but it still manages to respond to the diversified needs of people through various religious events. It seems,

therefore, that the *Nozaki Kannon* is trying to respond to diversified desires in diversified ways.

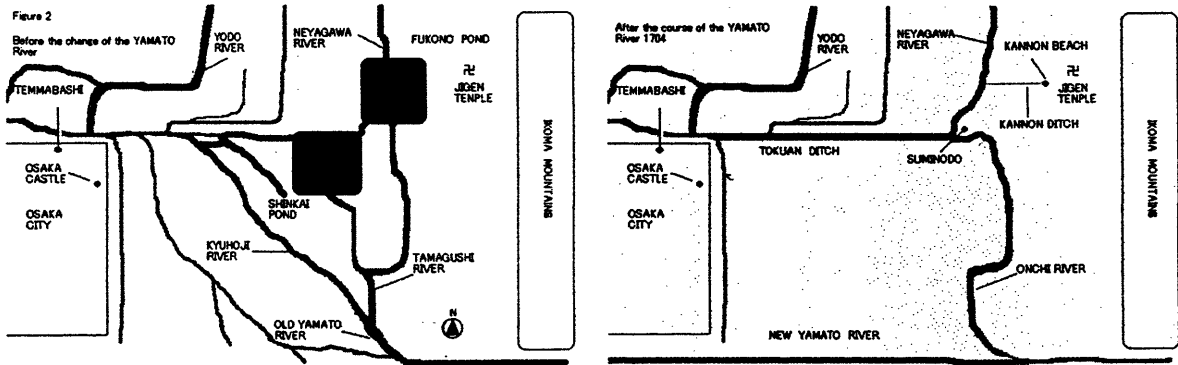
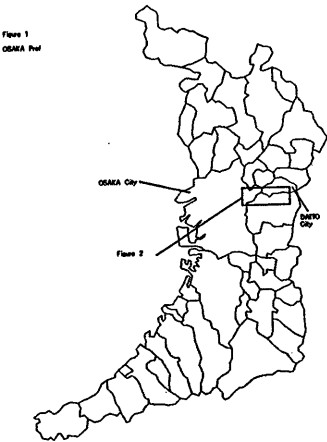


- 1) The popularity of gods is called *hayarigami* (Miyata 1993), which means that individuals formed the center of religious popularity. They profess to become “living deities”, or deities of healing after their deaths. They become the object of veneration as *hayarigami* or “popular deities”.
- 2) Until the change in course of the *Yamato* River, the route between Osaka and Nozaki went along the *Shinkai* pond and the *Fukono* pond. But the *Shinkai* pond and the *Fukono* pond were filled up because of changing the course of the river (figure 2). The areas of the ponds thereafter were used as rice field and many ditches and a road were built across the field. As a result, the distance between Osaka and *Nozaki* became shorter.
- 3) The population of Osaka was about 300,000 throughout the Edo period with about 10% urban commoners.
- 4) This is based on the understanding of people who have participated in various events.

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Chronological table of Jiganji temple(Nozaki-Kannon)history

A. D.	Occurrence of <i>Jiganji</i>	Occurrence in Japan
752	Priest <i>Gyōki</i> (668-749) made “Eleven-headed Kannon”; a Kannon with eleven miniature faces.	Construction of the Buddha statue of <i>Nara Todaiji</i> . Construction of the Great Buddha Hall took place concurrently and the statue was dedicated with a lavish consecration ceremony.
Heian period	The Wealthy person of Eguchi ( <i>Eguchi-no-kimi</i> ) lived <i>Setsu, Eguchi</i> (North Oosaka). When she prayed to the Kannon, her incurable disease was repaired. The temple was moved to the present land as gratitude.	
About 1568–88	The temple was burned down by a local military leader, <i>Nobunaga Oda</i> and <i>Hisahide Matsunaga</i> .	The era of the country at war
1616	Revival on temple was started by priest <i>Seigan</i> of a Soto sect.	Shougun <i>Tokugawa</i> is death
1682	Priest <i>Seigan</i> became the first priest. That time started at the <i>Nozakimairi</i> (temple visits).	
1687	Priest <i>Ryonan</i> (the forth priest) wrote a record of the temple ( <i>kokatsucho</i> )	
1689	The main hall of a Buddhist temple is built by charity of <i>Hiranoya Gohei</i>	
1694	The fifth priest <i>Daisin</i> enters the temple and completes the <i>kokatsucho</i> . It unveils a Buddhist image. Then <i>Nozakimairi</i> become popular.	
1708	Priest <i>Daisin</i> constructs a bell.	
1934	The main hall of the Buddhist temple is destroyed by the <i>Muroto</i> typhoon.	The Washington Convention canceled.
1935	The <i>Nozaki Kouta</i> (Japanese ballad song) by <i>Shouji Taro</i> becomes a large-hit.	
1950	Priest <i>Ippo</i> (the 19 <sup>th</sup> priest) reconstructs the main hall of the Buddhist temple.	
1972	A land slide occurs due to heavy rains. Some buildings (Rakan haall, a garden, Amibatba hall) are under the mud.	